



The first pool located along the Refuge Auto Drive - **F** - is home to a pair of breeding common loons whose life history spans the entirety of a color-marking project initiated at Seney in 1987. The F Pool male, known as the ABJ, was hatched and subsequently banded that summer on nearby G Pool. He returned to the Refuge as a breeding adult in 1990 (most loons do not reach sexual maturity until age three), and spent the following six years in pursuit of a viable territory and a willing partner; only in 1997 did he achieve success by forcibly evicting the F female's former mate, with whom she had been paired since 1990. In the wake of that coupling 17 years ago, the F Pair have distinguished themselves as the most reproductively robust loons at Seney: While the rest of the Refuge's nesting population has hatched an annual average of 0.8 chicks per pair, the F partnership has produced 1.4 chicks per season, and while the Refuge-wide fledging rate - that is, the rate of juvenile survivorship - has been 80%, the F pair have successfully fledged 95% of their offspring.

This season, after a month of incubation on a small island in the west end of their pool (pictured above), the F pair hatched two chicks on June 13. Already past their backriding phase with the advent of July, the F juveniles will spend the summer being diligently fed and protected by their parents, and growing rapidly; by the end of August, with the last of their brown down replaced by gray and white feathering, they will resemble a drab version of an adult loon. They will mature within a socially-dynamic Refuge environment marked by frequent F Pool intrusions from other breeding adults, typically young unpaired birds in search of territory and mate, much as the ABJ himself was in the early 1990s. The pressure upon territorial pairs from prospective challengers is constant, and the anomalism of the F pair's record 17-year partnership is underscored by the pattern demonstrated by their neighbors: The average length of alliance among the eight additional territorial pairs that visitors encounter along the Auto Drive and Fishing Loop is only 1.2 years. Unusually, some of these partnerships have succeeded in hatching chicks during their first season together:

The newly-coupled **H Pool** pair hatched two chicks on July 1; for the 10 year-old H male, it is his fourth territory and fourth mate as a breeding adult. The **J Pool** pair hatched one chick in late June; the J female's new partner is also her fourth since being color-marked (over)

as an adult in 2005. The **G Pool** pair failed in their initial incubation, and – unlike most Refuge pairs – did not subsequently re-nest; the G female is the eight year-old daughter of the superlative F Pool pair. The **D Pool** pair is undertaking a second nesting attempt that, if successful, will hatch in mid-July. The D female was banded as adult in 1989, and is thus at least 27 years old this season, a record for common loon longevity. She has occupied D Pool continuously since 1989, and her new 2013 mate replaces a Refuge male who perished last autumn on Lake Michigan, likely a victim of botulism poisoning. The **E Pool East** pair (several of Seney's larger pools contain two loon territories) is also undertaking a second nesting attempt; the 11 year-old E East male has yet to reproduce successfully over seven seasons of breeding effort. The **E Pool West** pair hatched two chicks in early July, one of which disappeared shortly thereafter; the new E West male replaces a 12 year-old son of the F Pool pair who also died on Lake Michigan last autumn during a widespread botulism outbreak. The **C Pool** pair's nesting attempt was disrupted in early July by an intruding female who ultimately evicted the resident adult; the C male, a 14 year-old son of the F pair, has yet to warm to the usurper, and the status of the territory remains in flux. Finally, the **Gray's Creek** pair (the small final pool along the Auto Drive, marked by an "OSPREY NEST – UNDER CONSTRUCTION" sign) hatched two chicks in late June (pictured below); the Gray's Creek male is a seven year-old son of the D female, and the female is a six year-old daughter to a pair on M2 Pool. Both were first-time breeders, and that collective inexperience likely informed their less-than-stellar parenting: Owing to a lack of food and protection, both chicks died in early July.

With nine surviving hatchlings and four active nests, the entire Refuge loon population is poised to exceed its long-term average of fledged offspring (8.3) for the first time since 2007. Although the typical reproductive efficiency of all Seney loons is humbled by the output of the F pair, beyond the confines of the Refuge this efficiency is nonetheless exemplary: No monitored loon population in the Great Lakes region (e.g. Isle Royale National Park, Voyageurs National Park, Boundary Waters Wilderness) matches Seney's rate of chick production. This achievement is largely a credit to the Refuge's unique prohibition upon watercraft (which prevents disturbance to nesting loons) and its pool management strategy that maintains high, stable water levels for almost all territorial pairs.

Damon McCormick, Common Coast Research & Conservation, [dlm@commoncoast.org](mailto:dlm@commoncoast.org), 906 202 0602

